Safeguards urged for gays, lesbians

A proposal to protect gay and lesbian city employees from discrimination could re-kindle a fierce debate that has split the city for more than a decade.

The City Charter Review Committee voted Monday to recommend adding "sexual orientation" to the list of conditions that must not be the basis for discriminating against an employee. The vote was 15-3, and one member of the City Council-appointed panel abstained.

"It's important for us to tell it

SEE **PROTECT** • PAGE 11

BUDDIES": 3:30 to 5 p.m., Cheyenne Mountain branch library, 1791-D S. Eighth St., and 6:30 to 8 p.m., East Library, 5550 N. Union Blvd., 531-6333, ext. 1412.

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PROTECT: 'Will that undo everything else?'

GAZETTE: 11-23

FROM PAGE 1

like it is — nobody should be discriminated against in their work," committee member Dottie Harman said.

The City Council will decide later whether to place an amendment to the city charter on the April 5 election ballot. The charter serves as a kind of constitutional document.

The charter now lists several groups who are protected from discrimination in employment decisions such as hiring, firing and promotions. The list does not include sexual orientation.

Charter Review Committee members said the city should adopt a nondiscrimination policy suggested in a model charter developed by the National Civic League. That document says the government should not discriminate based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, country of origin or political affiliation.

Some members of the committee, however, worried the issue is so controversial that it might distract attention from the other charter revisions the committee is proposing.

COUNCIL POSITIONS

IN FAVOR: Richard Skorman

OPPOSED: Tom Gallagher, Darryl Glenn, Margaret Radford

UNCOMMITTED: Lionel Rivera, Scott Hente, Jerry Heimlicher, Randy Purvis, Larry Small

"Will that undo everything else we're trying to do here?" committee member Sarah Jack asked.

Colorado Springs' struggle with gay rights dates at least to 1992, when a group based here promoted a change to the state constitution to prohibit gays and lesbians from receiving special protection. The measure passed, but the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously struck it down.

The City Council granted health benefits to same-sex partners of city employees in 2002, but it withdrew the benefits in 2003.

Each decision prompted ferocious debate on both sides, mostly focused on moral questions and homosexuality.

Some City Council members interviewed Monday said they would oppose granting protection to gays. Councilman Darryl Glenn said adding the provision to the charter would create new rights not recognized in state law.

"They want to create a city charter that violates the state law," Glenn said. "I'm not going to support it."

Councilwoman Margaret Radford also opposes the recommendation, saying it's merely a political statement and the city does not now have problems with discrimination against its gay employees.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/CENSUS OF MARINE LIFE

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entists in 53 countries a year earlier.

"In general, the smaller the animals are in the ocean, the more poorly known they are," J. Frederick Grassle, chairman of the project's scientific steering committee and director of Rutgers University's Institute of Marine & Coastal Sciences, said Monday.

This is the second consecutive year in which scientists have reported findings since the project began in May 2000.

The part of the census dealing with microbes, the smallest organisms, is just starting.

When that part is done, scientists think they will find that the oceans — which extend across 70 percent of Earth's surface — hold 20,000 species of fish and as many as 1.98 million species of animals and plants, many of them small, basic life-forms such as worms and jellyfish.

be discovered.

what exists," said Ronald O'Dor, a marine biologist at Dalhousie University in Canada and the project's chief scientist.

"Until you bring all the data together into one place, you don't realize that two different people in two different countries have given different names to the same thing."

About $125 million has been spent on the census.

Its price tag eventually is expected to reach $1 billion, most of it from participating governments.

The idea for the census grew from scientists' concerns that human population growth might permanently alter the oceans' diverse life-forms, as the National Academy of Sciences reported in 1995.

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